



17 November 2023

Joint statement

on the occasion of the 9th edition of the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November)

issued by six Council of Europe member States
(Andorra, Belgium, Luxembourg, Monaco, San Marino and Slovenia)

and supported by 37 other Council of Europe member States:

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as well as by the European Union

“Learning from victims/survivors of childhood sexual violence to inspire policy change”

18 November 2023 marks the 9th European Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. This year's theme focuses on the importance of giving a voice to victims and survivors of sexual violence and listening to their stories in order to learn valuable lessons and inspire policy change. This day is all the more important as the numbers of sexually exploited and abused children are ever increasing. We also have to give special importance to the children of Ukraine who are suffering from the Russian war of aggression.

Sexual exploitation and abuse of children often go unnoticed. Children, overwhelmed by feelings of shame and guilt or by fear of not being believed, are often unable to talk about the violence they have suffered. As a result, much of it remains unknown and ignored, due to communication difficulties and lack of reporting, and the perpetrators go unpunished. It is essential to remember that violence and sexual abuse suffered by children is never their fault. It is therefore vital to help victims confide in others, so that they can receive appropriate support to overcome the trauma they have suffered.

Listening to victims, making sure to not re-traumatize them, might not only contribute to their psychological and psychosocial rehabilitation, but might also allow us to learn from their suffering, so that we can better recognize the signs of abuse. It might also help to improve protection and prevention services in order to take all the necessary measures to prevent abuse, support child victims and survivors, and prosecute the perpetrators. To achieve this, it is essential to break the silence around sexual abuse by raising awareness at all levels of

our societies, particularly among children, social workers, parents, guardians and close relatives belonging to the circle of trust. They need to be able to talk freely and without fear, to be actively supported without discrimination, to deal with the trauma and live healthy lives.

Protecting children from sexual abuse and violence also involves improving and strengthening the legal and regulatory framework. In this context, it is important for countries to work towards a common understanding of terminology. Guides for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse have already been drawn up, such as the "[Luxembourg Guidelines](#)". We need to use all available tools to define, strengthen and coordinate work between countries, sectors and bodies responsible for child protection.

In this respect, we are proud that the Lanzarote Convention is one of the Council of Europe conventions to have been ratified by all 46 member States and serves as a blueprint for States to prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. We will continue our efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse of children beyond the ratification process, and look forward to the effective implementation of its provisions. We reaffirm our support to the Lanzarote Committee and we call for more cooperation with civil society and welcome the granting of observer status to the [Brave Movement](#) in January 2023.

We welcome the Council of Europe initiative to organise a panel on engaging with survivors on 30th November, which will explore the concrete steps policy makers can take to better engage with victims and survivors, and look forward to the finalisation of the guidelines for policy makers on survivor engagement.

Giving a voice to the victims and actively supporting them is key to pave the way for change!